

HON Rowland and Ms Rickard
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To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter today regarding *the Strategy Review of the Online Safety Act 2021*. I have serious concerns regarding how the Australian government conducts itself with online affairs; the internet should be an open place to discuss ideas and share information, in addition should not be regulated and monitored by a government body of any matter. I feel that my definition of the internet is shared by many and if the government and the commission that is charged with regulating online affairs (the eSafety commission/commissioner) is granted sweeping unrestricted powers to force online distributors and websites to comply with laws made and enforced by government could lead to suppression of speech, freedom of information, freedom of thought and choice of association online.

I have sympathy for people who have been targeted online but, I do not agree that because someone may be harmed by something online, the government must govern and police the internet. The internet is virtual, if these people no longer wish to be targeted they can remove themselves from the internet or websites where they're being harassed. I do not agree with the harassment of anyone but, you do not have a right to the internet or a right to a certain website so why must laws be passed to potentially suppress free thought and discussions because it may be at the expense of one's emotional expense? The most visited websites and distributors already have policies that they enforce regarding these matters, it shouldn't be up to the government to penalise a distributor or website with laws if they do not follow them.

I have no issue with the government using its power to compel a website or online distributor to take down the material of a photo of oneself or personal information off their service. That should be the extent to which the government is involved apart from taking down illicit and illegal websites that operate within the Commonwealth. "online harms" needs a very specific and narrow definition that must be set out in legislation in regards to regulating speech online to prevent bad actors from using the system to remove criticism, thoughts or restrict access to videos and images of events as well as speeches of others in public. We live in a democracy where freedom of information is key, the internet is now the medium where information is exposed and seen by the masses. Potentially seeing heinous things or being offended is a part of everyday life that is not exclusive to the internet; people hear and see horrible things every day so why must we police it online?

Another matter is online age-gating content like video games, TV shows, movies and rated material with the need to provide a Digital ID to prove age is another example of overreach and may lead to privacy and civil issues.

In closing; I do not believe the government needs to regulate the online environment, have powers together online information, remove "harmful content" (Which is in the eye of the beholder and is subjective), introduce online harassment and non-compliance penalties and introduce age-gating technology to restrict access to online material (with verification through Digital ID)

Thank you,

